

Getting the most out of your Internal Audits!

It's quite often the first thing a new client asks me... "We do our Internal Audits but we continually receive non-conformances from External Audits?". The plain truth in many food businesses is that they aren't conducting Internal Audits in a manner which meets the requirements of their GFSI, Industry and Customer Standards and to ensure they are getting the most out of their Quality Assurance Programs.

In short... they really aren't getting the maximum benefit out of their Internal Audits! Internal Audits are intended not only to Verify Compliance... they are an integral element of any business' ability to improve their management systems and face 'risk' head on!

A properly scheduled, planned and implemented Internal Audit Program will identify system conformance, failure and opportunities for improvement, but to achieve this you'll need to ensure appropriate levels of human and financial resources are available to support the process. No doubt there'll be some readers who'll be rolling their eyes at the mere notion of the required "human and financial resources" for their Food Safety and Quality Program, but a strong and well-structured Internal Audit process is guaranteed to save your business money... even in the short term!

I recall discussing Food Safety and Quality 'resourcing' requirements with a Food Sector Client a few years ago, and I conducted a simple review activity with the CEO and Quality Assurance Manager of the large multi-site Food Production Company based in the USA. We worked out the cost (to the business) of facilitating Internal Food Safety and Quality System Audits over the prior 3 years, and compared this to the cost of rectifying Food Safety and Quality System Non-conformances raised at External Audits (conducted to GFSI, Industry and Customer Standards).

It was no surprise to me (based on my experience) that there was a massive in-balance between the two outcomes. Even when we removed the cost of the physical (i.e. required maintenance works and equipment replacement) improvements required to rectify the non-conformances, the cost of rectifying such non-conformances represented a premium of at least 600% to the cost of their Internal Audit processes.

Part of my recommendation in this scenario was to suggest additional Internal Audit 'time' to at least triple that of the prior identified levels. I participated as a mentor to the business for their Internal Audit Processes (among other Food Safety and Quality System elements). Within 12 months, the ratio of 'Internal Audit Cost' to 'External Audit non-conformance cost' had reduced to just 50%, so the business was well on their way to significantly lowering their compliance expenditure. It is important within this example to acknowledge that such a stellar turn-around was only achieved with the genuine commitment of Management through a strategic approach to providing the required human and financial resources.

The outcomes of this activity clearly demonstrated that a thorough and properly implemented Internal Audit Program will save your business money, providing you follow some basic rules, including:

Genuine Management Commitment

With a considered approach, any sized business can successfully implement an Internal Audit Program that facilitates genuine continuous improvement across the scope of their implemented Food Safety and Quality Programs. The Senior Management of every food business needs to clearly understand that auditable food standards (Including GFSI Standards) are based on an approach which is all about 'complying'... not 'planning to comply', and to support the process accordingly.

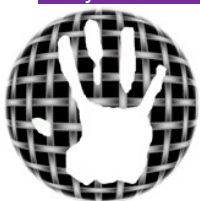
Something I often note during my consultancy interactions with Food businesses is how 'familiarity' with the Internal Auditing Process, coupled with a lack of human and financial resources creates a guaranteed ineffective outcome. Even very experienced Quality Assurance personnel sometimes bow to pressure and their own integrity to facilitate Internal Audits which they know aren't up to scratch!

classic example of ensuring the team members nominated to conduct Internal Audits not only have the right experience and knowledge... but also have the right aptitude for such tasks.

Personality also plays a staunch role within the success of an Internal Audit Program. I always advise my clients to choose Internal Auditors not only with relevant experience and understanding of the process to be audited... but to prioritise team members who are naturally inquisitive and who continually challenge the status quo. Internal Audits are no place for 'comfortable' long term employees who are just doing them because it's part of their positional role.

Back to Basics Approach

As part of a contemporary application of Food Safety and Quality ethos, I always encourage my clients to consider the following questions:



This is where the internal machinations of any business' Food Safety and Quality System should be used to ensure Senior Management are aware of such grievances and are aired within the correct business forums. Any genuinely committed Senior Management should welcome such commentary as this is directly linked to the integrity and stature of their Food Safety and Quality Program, which in turn genuinely mitigates risk for their business and brand.

The Right Person for the Job

One sure fire way of ensuring that you've demonstrated an effective commitment to achieving your Food Safety and Quality goals is to ensure that your Internal Audits are being conducted at the highest level. Experience, Seniority, Education and Charisma doesn't make a good Internal Auditor! What does matter is that the Auditor has the correct set of skills for the job at hand.

It's not what you look at... It's what you see! Inattentional blindness (also known as perceptual blindness), is a psychological lack of attention to detail that may be further defined as an event in which an individual fails to perceive an unexpected stimulus that is in plain sight. Inattentional blindness is not associated with any vision defects or deficits.

I've actually been in scenarios where highly experienced Quality Assurance Managers with whom I've been participating within onsite during site GMP inspections have been so distracted by the noise and activity around them they literally can't see obvious significant premises and equipment defects a couple of meters right in front of them until the item is specifically pointed to.

This isn't necessarily their fault, as everyone's brain processes and acknowledges information differently... It's a

- What are we meant to be doing?
- What are we actually doing?
- How are we doing it?
- Is this the best way for our business to do it?

Some businesses (through their Internal Audit Programs) have forgotten the basics of ensuring their Internal Audits verify compliance to the relevant standards before they assess if they are facilitating the requirements of their own policies and procedures!

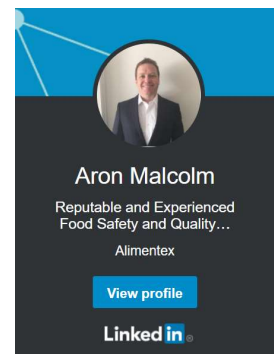
Time and Segregation

One of the most important resource allocations for the Internal Audit Process is Time! I continually engage with new clients who have complex, multi-process and multi-product businesses and ask them how long their Internal Audit Process would take to complete over the course of a year. In many instances, it's not un-common to hear that such a business only spends 3-4 days conducting their Internal Audits, where as I would generally expect to see at least 2 full weeks of time allocated to their Internal Audit team.

Another common scenario for Internal Auditors is for them to be continually distracted throughout the Internal Audit process. Ideally (to achieve the best outcomes), Internal Auditors should be quarantined from usual tasks while participating within the Internal Audit Process. This allows them to focus on the many aspects of what is a complex review method and to genuinely consider whether the system element(s) they are reviewing are compliant. Internal Auditors should remain un-interrupted (wherever possible) whilst conducting an Internal Audit to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Authored by: Aron Malcolm

Aron Malcolm is a Reputable and Experienced Food Safety and Quality Professional who had lead specialist Technical and Certification Audits in over 35 countries. With an auditing style described as "advanced" and a distinctive ability to rapidly observe and identify systemic and site deficiencies that have the very real potential to cause Food Safety and Food Quality issues which can damage Brands and Reputation, Aron has been the recipient of multiple Food Industry accolades. Couple this with the pragmatism, integrity and experience of a reputable Food Industry Expert and you have someone who will be an asset to your prosperity. 17 years of Consulting experience across the globe has also equipped Aron with a unique set of skills and resources to provide swift tailored advice to clients where they are experiencing technical challenges! This can provide a fast turn-around following the identification of Food Safety or Food Quality improvement opportunities... all with the agility and innovative approach of contemporary advice that creates efficiency in related outcomes. [More...](#)



Find out more about Internal Auditing at foodindustrycompliance.com!

We understand the high levels of commitment, human and financial resource allocations required to manage Food Safety and Quality Systems at the highest level. This is why we developed foodindustrycompliance.com as your knowledge, information, training and review tool for Food Safety and Quality Management! We believe that Food Safety should not be a competitive advantage - It is an expected ethical responsibility that should not be dictated by excess fees and charges by some Food Safety and Quality Consultants!



ALIMENTEX
FOOD CONSULTING GROUP
www.alimentex.com

haccp.com was created to support food businesses and food industry professionals in achieving and maintaining the stringent requirements of food industry compliance. The haccp.com website is accompanied by a mobile app that allows users to access key information and resources on the go.



We understand the high levels of commitment, human and financial resource allocations required to manage Food Safety and Quality Systems at the highest level. This is why we developed haccp.com as your knowledge, information, training and review tool for Food Safety and Quality Management! We believe that Food Safety should not be a competitive advantage - It is an expected ethical responsibility that should not be controlled by the excessive fees and charges by some Food Safety and Quality Consultants!

haccp.com also gives users access to 4 other related websites, each with its own unique theme, covering Food Sector News, Suppliers and Service Providers, Approved Supplier Management, Certification, Information, Customisable Food Safety and Quality Program Manuals and Checklists, HACCP plans, Flexible Training for Food Industry Participants and a HACCP Jobs Board.

Does your Food Business struggle under the burden of multiple Food Safety and Quality Regulations, Customer and Industry Standards and Industry Guidelines? foodindustrycompliance.com is the Quality, Safety and Risk Management resource you have been waiting for! The foodindustrycompliance.com mantra is simple... We aim to provide an accessible online Food Safety and Quality resource to assist you and your business in achieving continuous improvement against the requirements of Food and Consumer Law, Customer and Industry Standards and accepted Food Industry Best Practice.



certificationbodyfinder.com allows users of to ensure their certification and accreditation processes remain cost effective by providing the ability to request and receive quotations from multiple Certification Bodies with the click of a button. This is significantly more time and resource efficient than current methods, which rely on substantial time and efforts from businesses being certified to specified standards. Imagine being able to review the quotation for a single, or multiple certifications within a user-friendly format from Certification Bodies you choose, within the timeframe that suits your schedule... certificationbodyfinder.com is your one and only certification quotation resource!

The easiest way to describe approvedsuppliernetwork.com is as the world's smartest and most organized filing cabinet... A filing cabinet that does the filing for you and lets you know whenever the files change, approach expiry or have expired. You have complete control over the content of your file, and most importantly, you decide and control who can access your details. With a secure permission based platform, you control the Users that have access to your details on approvedsuppliernetwork.com. You can upload Approved Supplier Documents to approvedsuppliernetwork.com and your existing or potential Customers (whom you have granted access) can view and download them as required.



We created haccpjobs.com to be the ultimate source for jobs involving Food Safety and Food Quality Management! Our goals are aligned with yours... haccpjobs.com will be the first place Food Safety and Quality Professionals from around the globe go

for the most comprehensive, relevant and highest quality source of relevant job opportunities. haccpjobs.com will be every employer's first choice for advertising their Food Safety and Quality employment opportunities and sourcing qualified HACCP professionals.

